

What is Claimed is:

1. A system for distributing digital documents having usage rights associated therewith, said system comprising:

a server having at least one document stored thereon in computer readable form;

5 a client having a standard application program including a rendering engine capable of rendering unencrypted documents for viewing;

a communications network coupled to said client and said server;

10 a rights management module for receiving a request for at least one of the documents from said client and delivering the at least one document and a set of rights associated with the at least one document to said client;

a connection module adapted to be attached to said rendering engine for receiving the list of rights associated with the at least one document;

15 a user interface module adapted to be attached to said rendering engine for controlling access by the client to the at least one document in accordance with the set of rights associated with said at least one document.

20 2. A system as recited in claim 1, wherein said connection module is operative to detect whether said user interface module is attached to said rendering engine and for providing the at least one of the documents to said rendering engine if said user interface module is attached to said rendering drive.

3. A system as recited in claim 2, wherein said connection module is operative to unencrypt the at least one of the documents.

4. A system as recited in claim 2, wherein said standard application program is a Web browser and said server includes an HTTP server.

5 5. A system as recited in claim 4, wherein said connection module and said user interface module attach to the rendering engine of the Web browser using at least one of ActiveX controls and plug-in technology.

10 6. A system as recited in claim 4, wherein said rights, management module comprises means for pointing to a start Web page stored on said server, and means for encrypting said means for pointing and wherein said connection module comprises means for unencrypting said means for pointing and wherein said system further comprises means for generating a secure start Web page which references said connection module and said means for pointing.

15 7. A system as recited in claim 4, wherein said connection module comprises means for generating a signature and said rights, management module comprises means for validating the signature, and wherein a request to said server is honored only if the signature is present and valid.

8. A method for distributing digital documents having one or more usage rights associated therewith, said method comprising the steps of:

20 storing at least one document on a server in computer readable form;

accessing the server with a client having a standard application program including a rendering engine capable of rendering unencrypted documents;

receiving a request for at least one of the documents from the client;

25 delivering the at least one of the documents and a set of rights associated with the at least one of the documents to the client;

receiving the list of rights associated with the at least one of the documents with a connection module attached to the rendering engine;

controlling access by the client to the at least one of the documents in accordance with the set of rights associated with the at least one of the documents through a user interface module attached to the rendering engine.

9. A method as recited in claim 8, further comprising the step of unencrypting the at least one of the documents.

10. A method as recited in claim 8, further comprising the steps of detecting whether the user interface module is attached to the rendering engine and providing the at least one document to the rendering engine if the user interface module is attached to the rendering drive.

11. A method as recited in claim 10, wherein said step of detecting further comprises determining whether said rendering engine has been compromised.

12. A method as recited in claim 10, wherein said standard application program is a Web browser and said server includes HTTP server software.

13. A method as recited in claim 12, further comprising the steps of providing a pointer on the server to a start Web page stored on the server, encrypting the pointer, generating a secure start Web page on the server which references the pointer, providing access to the secure start Web page through the Web browser, and unencrypting the pointer on the client to provide the Web browser access to the start Web page on the server.

14. A method as recited in claim 12, further comprising the steps of generating a signature with the client, transmitting the signature to the server with a request to the server, validating the signature with the server, and honoring the request only if the signature is present and valid.

15. In a computer architecture including a server having documents stored thereon, a start page for accessing the documents, and a client running an application program having a rendering engine, a method of distributing documents comprising the steps of:

- 5 installing a rights management module on the server;
- attaching a user interface module and a connection module to the rendering engine;
- creating a secure start page on the server;
- placing the documents in directory;
- 10 programming the rights management module to include a pointer to the directory;
- encrypting an address to the directory.
- modifying the secure interface display to reference the user interface module and the start page; and
- 15 unencrypting the address to the directory with the connection module to permit access to the start page and the documents on the server.

20 16. A method as recited in claim 15, wherein the server includes HTTP server software, wherein the application program is a Web browser, wherein the secure interface display is a secure start Web page and wherein the address to the directory is in the form of a URL.

17. A method as recited in claim 16, further comprising the steps of:
- accessing the secure start Web page by issuing a URL to the start page;
- directing the user interface module to the start page through the
- 25 reference to the start page in the secure start Web page;

creating an instance of the rendering engine;

loading the start page in the instance of the rendering engine to display the start page on the client;

5 directing the instance of the rendering engine, under control of the user interface module, to retrieve one or more of the documents from the server.

10 18. A method as recited in claim 16, wherein said step of directing the instance comprises the steps of intercepting commands from the Web browser with the user interface module and redirecting the commands through the connection module on the server.

19. A method as recited in claim 16, wherein said step of redirecting comprises the steps of instructing the instance to utilize a secure asynchronous protocol through the connection module.

15 20. A method as recited in claim 16, further comprising the steps of validating, with the connection module, that the user interface module is attached to the rendering engine and permitting the client to connect to the server only if the validation step is positive.